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ABSTRACT

Research on the quality of employees' working life can be adapted to studies of the quality of working life for homemakers. However, a basic difference to be considered is the homemakers' values about their work, the goals, and the rewards. Open-ended interviews about homemaking with 30 metropolitan homemakers yielded a wide variety of responses, including the consensual belief that homemaking is indeed "real work." Reasons for choosing the homemaker role ranged from a perceived lack of choice or sense of duty to a definite preferance for homemaking rather than paid employment. Most respondents mentioned, in addition to home management, their satisfaction in providing a warm environment for their families as well as community involvement. The findings suggest that a broader model that covers all aspects of the quality of working life is needed to fully understand the dynamics of homemaking and provide a framework for processing homemakers' values. (JAC)

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EVALUATING HOMEMAKERS' QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE: ESTABLISHING CRITERIA OF QUALITY

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Research on the quality of working life of employed workers is today well accepted and widely applied. If we think of homemakers as workers, we may adapt this research to their needs, discovering within it useful theoretical foundations, models and data-gathering techniques which will help us to understand and eventually to improve homemakers' quality of working life. Homemakers, however, differ from employed workers in many important respects, including the facts that they receive no salary and that they are not generally part of work groups or organizations. A basic difference is the fact that, as a group, homemakers' values about their work, its goals, and its rewards, may differ significantly from those of employed workers. Because of this difference we should approach the existing theory and practice in quality of working life with caution. Available theories and instruments reflect particular values and organizational constraints on what "quality" is. For instance, one such value orientation is the widespread inclusion in quality of working life questionnaires of questions regarding acceptability of a worker's pay scale. Since homemakers have no pay scale, obviously other kinds of questions must be devised in order to tap what may be similar motivational issues for them.

Instead of relying solely on traditional notions of quality of working life, then, researchers need to create strategies for allowing homemakers' values to be reflected in the structure of any quality of working life survey of homemakers. An analogous research paradigm would be the notion of participation by both host and investigator

countries in cross-cultural studies (Andre, 1979).

Such inclusions will increase information validity and in addition, the notion of consideration of alternative problem formulations and frames of reference is a crucial beginning to building trust among those involved (Thorsrud, 1975, p. 199).

The purpose of this paper is to make such a beginning by exploring homemakers' work values and discussing the implications of these values for the design of a quality of working life measure.

METHOD

Open-ended interviews were conducted with 30 homemakers in the metropolitan areas of Detroit and Philadelphia. Interviewees were encouraged to talk freely and at length (up to three hours, but usually about one hour) about homemaking. The tape-recorded interviews were conducted one on one by the author and by three trained undergraduate women. The homemakers interviewed comprise a diverse group, including women ages 19 to 90 and ethnic groups including Black, Cuban, Polish, and Jewish. One male homemaker is included. Most respondents have a family income of $15,000-$30,000, though several fall at the extremes above and below. Some have completed college; a few never finished high school.

During the interviews eight open-ended questions were asked.

One of these questions ("Do you think homemaking is really work?") was written to determine homemakers' receptivity to the idea of homemaking as legitimate work, and was included to determine whether there would be any sympathy at all among homemakers for this conceptualization of their occupation. The results of this question indicate

that indeed there is a mutual belief in the notion that homemaking is "really" work. Fifteen of the 16 people whose responses to this question were coded asserted that homemaking is work.

The remaining questions were designed to give mild direction without unduly influencing the interviewees' responses. These questions reflect four general issues related to an individual's work: work goals, work quality, job satisfaction, and available rewards. The seven core questions, and their associated follow-up probes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Core Questions

Work Goals

Ideally what is the purpose of homemaking?
Probe: to the family? to society?

Why are you a homemaker?

Work Quality

What makes a good homemaker?

Satisfaction

What makes a happy homemaker?
Probe: when are you happiest?

What makes an unhappy homemaker?
Probe: when are you the unhappiest?

Rewards

Do you think that homemakers deserve more for what they do?
Probe: from other people? from the government?
(Avoid: indications of exactly what rewards might be deserved.)

Do you think that you deserve more for what you do?

Responses to the open-ended questions were summarized and tabulated. Because our aim here is to assemble a range of possible responses, rather than to gain an indication of strength of response, all responses are reported, while the number of times a response was mentioned is not reported.

RESULTS

Responses are presented in Tables 2-5. The responses generally consist of phrases actually used by the interviewees, though in some cases they have been written to reflect the context of an interviewee's statement. In the tables the responses are grouped merely to facilitate reading. These groupings should not be interpreted as theoretical structure of any kind.

The number of respondents for each question is indicated in the tables. This N-size varies from 12 to 30. The reasons for this variation are several. In some cases homemakers, even when encouraged, simply replied "I don't know about that." This reply was frequently unemotional, perhaps indicating that the homemaker had no ideas on the topic. In a few instances this reply seemed more emotionally based, indicating some resistance to the topic. Interviewers, instructed to maintain a positive climate, did not investigate emotionally sensitive topics, except insofar as remaining silent allowed the respondent to continue. The number of individuals responding to any given question also varied because of interviewer effects; on one occasion an interviewer reported getting so involved with the homemaker's story that she forgot to ask the questions. On other occasions, interviewers decided that one or another question would be intrusive. Yet another

Table 2

Work Goals

Ideally, what is the purpose of homemaking? N = 18

Fulfilling my destiny.

Having a family; having the baby.

Giving the children a roof over their heads; keeping them within a community; to help them develop to be creative, active, human beings, to make them able to function in the world when they grow older, to help them be independent; to set patterns for the children to follow; involving the child in contributing to the family--not allowing them to be selfish; to show the children steadfastness--seeing their daddy try his best in creating, being successful, devoting himself to a purpose; having a good time with the kids; making life interesting for them; making good people out of them; make your children be accepted into the life of society; help them handle different situations by seeing the way you handled them.

To make a loving atmosphere in the home; to give somebody a really pleasant place to come home to and feel secure.

Getting the housework done and doing it right.

A clean home, clean clothes, decent meals; keeping up the housekeeping in case someone walks in--the brunt of this falls on the woman; providing a pleasant surrounding for your family; to have everything in its place and just so; to improve, with new furniture and so on, for a change.

For husband and wife to depend on, encourage and love each other when its needed.

Keeping your family group together, giving them support, reinforcement and strength against the cold, cruel world; letting them know they've got that little group to rely on.

To keep my husband happy--to find out what he likes and dislikes in food, to satisfy him as a woman, too; to have a relaxed happy atmosphere for your husband to come home to, he's been working so I feel I owe him something--at least to make it as comfortable as possible.

Making sure everyone is pleased, that they have what they need and are satisfied.

Table 2, Cont.

Making sure everything goes smoothly.

To provide a homelife for people in society--without it there would be more problems in society, more people at loose ends.

To be happy (even if you have to sleep on the floor).

To share things.

To cater to the men.

Primarily maintenance--to have some semblance of a healthy environment in which to live and maintain oneself. A necessity.

It's a challenge to make it as easy as possible.

Why are you a homemaker? N = 19

It was necessary for me to be in the house when my children got home from school.

A fear of going to work where I might face someone (male) who would make me discontent at home.

I'm a woman and its the woman's job, right?--just because its expected of me; you were brainwashed into thinking the role would make you happy.

My kids need a clean place.

I'm a perfectionist--I expect everything done and done to perfection.

I'm trying to please my husband--he said that my making money might make it harder for us to get along because I might be too independent--my being dependent makes him a man; because I like it and my husband wouldn't let me go out and work.

Being home with the kids because they grow up so fast.

I got pregnant and figured I had a lot to do before the baby came, and then decided to stay home until after we have our 2 children.

To have a home and to have someone with me--that was the whole answer; this was the ultimate.

Kids need the security of their mother being home.

Table 2, Cont.

Because of what I saw in my parents, a very happily married couple, I decided I was supposed to cherish, and treasure and love somebody.

The whole materialistic thing goes along with your happy package--a home, nice cars, nice clothing, flowers.

To be catered to, appreciated, as queen (while he's treasured and provided for as king).

You choose to get married and have kids--you could choose to be single.

With babies and marriage, I have no choice.

Now that I have no children at home, and have worked outside the home, I revel in the leisure time.

Itwasn't really a conscious choice.

I don't like the outside work--a daily routine, getting hollered at, fitting into a neat little shell--I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it and this is the only thing I've found that I can do like that.

I just like to do it. I like everything about keeping house--cooking, puttering around, making the place look inviting.

I think I do a better job than my husband can, and a more professional job, and with more love, than someone I would hire.

Table 3

Work Quality

What makes a good homemaker? N = 12

A house that looks lived in; is comfortable; is clean; is nice and tidy.

Making a home as pleasant, attractive, and happy as you can.

When kids are well fed; well-clothed; being there to give them advice and love.

One that makes time for herself.

The more energy she puts into her home, the more pleasurable that home will be.

Being willing to satisfy your husband in any way you can--listen to his gripes, don't be a slob around him, always have a smile on your face when he comes home after a hard day's work.

Living day by day making the best of everything you've got.

Not being nervous about what other people think; not taking yourself too seriously.

Being organized; keeping things from getting hectic; keeping structured but loose--not regimented.

Someone who goes beyond housekeeping to make the home a place that is a haven for the family, the central place for the family.

I don't like to be labeled as a homemaker or housewife because it implies a person whose major priority is keeping up the house, someone who is less intelligent, closed-minded, and lives in a little sheltered home.

Really caring about your family; providing a nice life; when she's pleasing (or satisfying, or getting along with) your husband and children (family).

Table 4

Satisfaction

Satisfaction - What makes a happy homemaker? N = 28

Time alone (at home; vacations; with one's children; apart from one's husband).

A feeling of contentment (with the world, with the children).

A feeling that things are going smoothly.

Quiet.

Independence (achieving goals I've set; doing things I want to do myself; financial independency--not depending on spouse; making decisions myself).

Freedom to go out (by oneself, at night, with friends, with husband and children, with children but not husband, with husband alone).

Children (playtime with; existence of; happiness of).

Husband's respect, husband's caring.

Being on schedule.

Having a relaxed atmosphere of order in which you know where everything is but aren't afraid to mess it up.

Having cleanliness (attending to the details of cleaning; when things stay clean).

Being in pleasant surroundings (being in home surroundings).

Showing off one's nice home.

Being active in the (children's) school.

Making things (crafts).

Redecorating (putting my talent into a room, buying for the house).

Doing something for others (making something for my husband, entertaining, seeing people happy).

Cooking (enjoying it as relaxation, baking, for other people, for my kids).

Table 4, Cont.

Family (a happy family, a healthy family), when you're appreciated by your family, when you're together with your family, when you have your family at home.

Yardwork.

When you want to be a homemaker (your desire to make a happy home; your attitude).

Dinnertime--hectic but sharing.

The neighborhood, community feeling.

Doing a whole piece of work.

Dissatisfaction - What makes an unhappy homemaker? N = 30

Tension.

Children who are bored; dirty; disciplined unfairly; baby is frustrating.

Dusting.

Violence, fighting.

Disruptions.

Husband: A one-sided relationship with one's husband; being dependent on him; putting his life ahead of yours; trying to please him instead of bettering yourself; a selfish husband; one who spends money on himself instead of helping us get ahead; not communicating with husband; when he's home; when things aren't going well between husband and me.

Lack of appreciation (from children, husband, friends), being taken for granted, or actual abuse of her efforts.

When I'm not doing for a lot of people that I'd like to do for.

Cleaning house (process is boring, frustrating, never done), ironing, laundry, (all monotonous and time-consuming), cleaning out the basement, dishes, cooking, planning meals day after day.

Moods where I want to go out and work, and not be tied down (especially in winter, wanting to be single again).

Loneliness for children after they've left home (permanently).

Table 4, Cont.

Having company for a long time (3-4 days).

Not a prestigious job anymore; pressure to be out doing something else, doing something with your life (homemaking seen as mindless, pointless).

Routine of it.

Getting my kids to do something.

Interruptions, rushing, chaos.

When cooking doesn't turn out.

Frustrations when you try to get a lot done and can't.

When we're moving from one town to another.

Living in an area I don't want to live in, where no one in neighborhood is friendly.

An uncomfortable house.

Not enough money to do what you need to do.

Dinnertime chaos and confusion and frustration.

Incompatibility with family or home.

Disliking all the things that go with a home.

Table 5

Rewards

Do you think homemakers deserve more for what they do? N = 20

A token from the state--something that would be hers every month to do with what she pleased--would make it all seem worthwhile; getting paid sounds terrific!

Some law should state that you should receive this much money a week, regardless, from your husband.

They can't pay a homemaker enough money--I don't think you can put a dollar sign on a homemaker.

I've invested in this (marital) partnership and no way is anything his, it's all ours. But the law says "He who worked for it, owns it." The homemaker's role has always been negated.

Nobody understands how hard every single day is.

More credit from husbands and from women who are not homemakers.

They don't get a paycheck but you get a happy family life, the appreciation of your family.

A modest income from your husband would make you feel more like a partner.

Some deserve more credit than others because of the number of people they're caring for.

The working (employed) homemaker deserves probably the most credit.

Monetary recognition from the government would be most acceptable, but some sort of recognition no matter what it was would be nice.

You get self-satisfaction, sort of like volunteer work, and all volunteers should get a tax break.

Social security protection is needed.

The satisfactions are often very private.

Homemaking is an economic luxury.

No, homemaking is her part of the bargain (with her husband); she does it for her husband and herself and we never got paid before.

Table 5, Cont.

Your pay is the gratitude of your family. That's worth more than money.

It's only when you're unhappy that you start figuring what it's worth.

Your compensation is a smile. . .but you have to have a little means of support, both psychologically and financially.

Do you think you deserve more for what you do? N = 15

No. I'm very lucky--I have my own house, my husband is very fair, he's always giving me something, little surprises.

People have been very grateful, kind, and complimentary. I couldn't ask for more.

The only reward was satisfaction that it was done.

I've got super vacations, go to the finest restaurants, have 3 kids in college all producing, and got a diamond ring for Christmas.

We get a lot of strokes from the extended family because of our ability to cope. [From a male homemaker.]

Yes. Sometimes I'm taken for granted: my family expects what I do for them.

The government should supplement the family: I'm not taking a job away from someone who needs the income.

I deserve recognition; to go away to a hotel or motel and just lay and sleep and not move; to go to a health spa and just pamper myself.

Recognition is important, someone saying "You've got a really hard job."

Nobody, other than another homemaker, really appreciates what I do.

Some people think women are homemakers because they can't do anything else.

Homemaking needs more status--I'd feel better about doing it.

problem was that of constant unavoidable interruptions and time pressures: one interview had to be carried out with interviewer and homemaker propped up on the bed in the homemaker's bedroom (and they were still interrupted).

If the purpose of this project had been to make inferences about a whole population based on our sample, or to compare ideas from one interviewee to another, these interview irregularities would have presented more of a methodological problem. As it is, our goal in this project is simply to record a range of possible ideas--to tap as many homemaker values as possible--and in designing our project we felt that diversity of interviewees, of interviewer styles, and of settings would be facilitative. The problems we encountered, however, are not untypical of those faced by researchers in the home (see Berk and Berheide, 1977), and should be recognized by researchers pursuing more precise procedures.

DISCUSSION

A perusal of these tables and even a cursory comparison of their contents with the kind of quality of working life surveys used with employed workers indicate gross differences. For instance, the quality of working life survey used by one major manufacturing company includes 15 categories of questions, as follows: employe commitment, absence of developing apathy, on-the-job development and utilization, employe involvement and influence, advancement based on merit, career goal progress, relations with supervisor, work group relations, respect for individual, confidence in management's understanding, physical working environment, economic well being, employe state of mind,

absence of undue job stress, and impact on personal life. Of these, several seem totally inapplicable to homemakers: advancement based on merit, career goal progress, relationship with supervisor, work group relations, and confidence in managers' understanding. Questions such as "To what extent is job experience financially rewarded in (this company)" and "To what extent do you feel that you deserve to have been promoted higher by now?" cannot be used with homemakers, because they lack face validity (though the motivational principles behind them ought not be lost). Other topics are related to the homemaking job, but individual questions would need to be rethought for use with a homemaking population. For example, in the home, what is the equivalent of employee commitment? commitment to family? to children alone or to husband alone? To study the absence of developing apathy do we really wish to use the statement "I used to be more ambitious about my work than I am now."? (Do we really think that ambition means the same thing to homemakers that it does to employed workers?)

We could investigate other standard quality of working life measures--the Survey of Organizations [Bowers, 1973] is among these. It includes 15 "critical indexes" in four categories: organizational climate, supervisory leadership, peer leadership, and satisfaction [Pecorella, et al., 1978]. Again, it is clear that some of these categories won't suit homemakers, particularly the leadership indexes.

But I think an exhaustive investigation of such standard measures is unnecessary. The case is easily made that these will not suit homemakers' values. Perhaps some of their questions can be adapted for homemakers, but the basic theoretical frameworks do not fit, and the language of even the pertinent questions must be scrutinized.

What can existing quality of working life research contribute to the study of homemakers? In deciding on a theoretical framework for homemakers' quality of working life it may be useful to turn to broader conceptualizations of quality of working life. Individual instruments tend to reflect the interests of their writers: the Survey of Organizations is based on a particular management theory; individual companies tailor surveys to their particular needs. However, a broad-ranging model, one that attempts to cover all aspects of quality of working life, may help us to fully understand the dynamics of homemaking. And, importantly, it may urge us beyond the conceptualizations that homemakers' have of their job. It may provide us with a framework for processing homemakers' own values to consider, for instance, an issue like pay--something few homemakers mention, probably because to them it seems so farfetched. The best quality of working life survey will be derived from an amalgam of homemakers' own reality-based values and a broad conceptualization of what quality of working life might be, ideally speaking.

One such broad-ranging conceptualization is suggested by Richard E. Walton, who presents eight criteria for the quality of working life. These criteria are described fully elsewhere [Walton, 1975]. Briefly, they are: (1) adequate and fair compensation, (2) safe and healthy working conditions, (3) immediate opportunity to use and develop human capacities, (4) opportunity for continued growth and security, (5) social integration in the work organization, (6) constitutionalism in the work organization, (7) the balance of work and total life space, and (8) the social relevance of work life. Each of these criteria warrants careful consideration as we create measures of

homemakers' quality of working life. By comparing homemakers' values with this set of ideals we may avoid simply accepting the homemakers' socialization as a sole basis for writing items. Obviously, because homemakers do not describe a need for continued growth does not prove that they lack such motivation. Slavish acceptance of homemakers' values may be just as unproductive as their outright rejection.

CONCLUSION

Even with its modest goal of assembling a range of homemakers' values, this study is necessarily limited by the size of its sample. It is my hope that the methodology presented here will be adopted by a number of other researchers, researchers from various geographic regions and with varying viewpoints. By combining our knowledge of homemakers' values, and by continuing our evaluative integration of existing quality of working life literature, we will develop a comprehensive survey that will yield accurate assessments of homemakers' quality of working life. One accepted methodology for designing such a survey is to generate as many questionnaire items as possible and reasonable, to administer these items to a large and representative sample of homemakers, to identify statistically the primary factors in the survey, and finally, to write a standardized, parsimonious survey. With this survey in hand we may then venture forth into the realm of wide-ranging, hopefully national, data collection.

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